



Heat waves and cold spells: An analysis of policy response and perceptions of vulnerable populations in the UK

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Abstract:

Heat waves and cold spells pose ongoing seasonal risks to the health and well-being of vulnerable individuals. Current attempts to address these risks in the UK are implemented through fuel-poverty strategies and heat-wave planning. This paper examines evidence from the UK on whether heat waves and cold spells are addressed differently by public policy in the UK given that risks are mediated by similar perceptions that shape behavioural responses by vulnerable individuals. It is based on a review of UK policies and on a qualitative interview study of risk perceptions of elderly people as a primary identified vulnerable group to these weather extremes. The study involved in-depth repeat interviews with fifteen elderly respondents in summer 2007 and winter 2008 in Norwich (UK). Results suggest that neither heat risks nor cold risks are perceived as personal risks and therefore planned preventive measures by individuals are largely elusive. Cold risk policy reduces vulnerability; policy related to heat relies on early warning and public information programmes and does not reduce underlying vulnerability. Both types of policies largely ignore public perceptions of risks and could benefit from a more cohesive approach, supporting similar measures to reduce seasonal vulnerability.

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Resource Description

Communication:

resource focus on research or methods on how to communicate or frame issues on climate change; surveys of attitudes, knowledge, beliefs about climate change

A focus of content

Communication Audience:

audience to whom the resource is directed

Policymaker, Public

Early Warning System:

resource focus on systems used to warn populations of high temperatures, extreme weather, or other elements of climate change to prevent harm to health

A focus of content

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Exposure :

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Temperature

Temperature: Extreme Cold, Extreme Heat

Geographic Feature:

resource focuses on specific type of geography

None or Unspecified

Geographic Location:

resource focuses on specific location

Non-United States

Non-United States: Europe

European Region/Country: European Country

Other European Country : United Kingdom

Health Impact:

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Injury

Intervention:

strategy to prepare for or reduce the impact of climate change on health

A focus of content

Mitigation/Adaptation:

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Adaptation

Population of Concern: A focus of content

Population of Concern:

populations at particular risk or vulnerability to climate change impacts

Elderly, Low Socioeconomic Status

Resource Type:

format or standard characteristic of resource

Research Article

Resilience:

capacity of an individual, community, or institution to dynamically and effectively respond or adapt to shifting climate impact circumstances while continuing to function

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Timescale: ☒

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified

Vulnerability/Impact Assessment: ☒

resource focus on process of identifying, quantifying, and prioritizing vulnerabilities in a system

A focus of content